

Associated Baptist Press

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WMU distributing materials
for AIDs education program

By Jim Jones

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- When Baptists have a hard job to do, they can always count on women to be in the forefront. So it is not surprising that the 1.2 million members of the Woman's Missionary Union are beginning a nationwide AIDS education program.

The program, Dare to Care, doesn't officially begin until October, but churches from Texas to Maine are already receiving educational materials on how to help those suffering from acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Some pious religionists have called AIDS a curse from God -- punishment for homosexual lifestyles and the promiscuity of heterosexuals. But most Baptists and other evangelicals don't go that far. Their faith compels them to assist people in trouble, regardless of their circumstances.

"We don't try to be judgmental in any of our materials in the AIDS project," said Trudy Johnson, special projects director of the Birmingham, Ala.,-based Woman's Missionary Union, an independent auxiliary of the Southern Baptist Convention.

But the AIDS education program of the women's group does promote traditional morality -- including sexual abstinence -- as a way of preventing the disease. Training materials from the women's group and other Baptist agencies emphasize that sexual contact and blood transfusions are the major ways of contracting AIDS.

Worshiping or praying with a person with AIDS won't give you the disease, the materials state. Cards asking for prayers for specific persons who have AIDs are also included. Information is given on setting up care teams and church education programs.

In February, the Woman's Missionary Union will sponsor a nationwide collection of items needed by AIDS hospices as well as money for services. The money will be donated to an AIDS hospice in Victoria, Brazil.

Baptists got a wake-up call about the AIDS pandemic four years ago when Jimmy Allen, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, revealed the tragedy that had happened to his family.

His daughter-in-law, Lydia Allen, became infected with human immunodeficiency virus through a blood transfusion. She and her youngest son, Bryan, died of AIDS and her oldest son, Matt, now 12, is critically ill with the virus.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

During the ordeal, Jimmy Allen's son, Scott Allen, was fired from his ministerial position with a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Colorado. Scott Allen returned to Texas where his father was then president of the Baptist Radio and Television Commission in Fort Worth.

Acting out of concern for the health of their congregations, leaders of Fort Worth-Dallas churches, both Baptist and those of other denominations, discouraged Scott Allen's family from attending Sunday school or other church functions.

One of the source materials offered by the women's group's AIDS program is a video, Valley of the Shadow distributed by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, which tells the story of the Allen family and includes videos of physicians and others talking about the disease. It also features information on services provided to AIDS patients by Broadway Baptist Church of Fort Worth and First Baptist Church of Arlington.

Johnson said Jimmy Allen's willingness to share the tragic story of his family has had a "tremendous impact" in convincing Baptist congregations to take up AIDS ministries.

For his part, Allen commends the WMU for its efforts, noting that it is a "network of women who historically have been involved in the cutting edge of caring.

"There has been a counter-tide, sort of hardening of the heart of the nation against those who need help," Allen said. "Compassion is evaporating in this country."

He believes rediscovering compassion in churches will help a great deal.

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-- Jim Jones is religion editor for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Used by permission.

Newspaper advertisement voices support for ousted prof

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- A large display ad titled "Public Statement in Support of Dr. Molly T. Marshall" appeared in the Louisville Courier-Journal Sunday, July 30.

The ad in the Kentucky newspaper carried the names of about 730 people who said they "mourn the loss of Molly Marshall's voice of advocacy in our community for women and all peoples in general."

Marshall was asked to resign as a theology professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Seminary President Albert Mohler charged that Marshall's teachings were outside the parameters of the seminary's doctrinal statement, the Abstract of Principles. No specific charges ever were leveled against Marshall publicly.

Critics of Mohler suggested Marshall was dismissed primarily because she is female. She joined the faculty in 1984 and later became the first female granted tenure in the theology school.

Mohler denied Marshall's resignation had anything to do with gender.

The ad supporting Marshall questions "President Mohler's contentions that the forced resignation of Molly Marshall is not based on her gender."

"When any woman is treated unjustly, it is a gender issue," the ad states. "We view the treatment of Molly Marshall as clear evidence that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will not tolerate diversity."

The ad notes "profound grief" and "adamant disapproval" of Marshall's dismissal. It praises Marshall as a teacher who "has always stood for the honest communication of religious knowledge and the open discussion of spiritual ideas important to all."

Most people signing the statement live in Kentucky, but the list included signers from as far away as Germany.

Since assuming the presidency in 1993, Mohler has spoken against women serving in certain roles of "teaching authority," particularly the pastorate. He has admitted this is an issue on which he has changed his views in recent years.

Ironically, 11 years ago Mohler led an effort to publish a similar advertisement in the Courier-Journal. That ad, published Aug. 4, 1984, stated opposition to a resolution on women passed two months earlier by the Southern Baptist Convention.

At that time, Mohler worked in the development office at Southern Seminary. He helped enlist 412 people to sign an ad opposing the SBC resolution, which said women should not be ordained to ministry. The ad called for "equal participation of women and men in the life and work of the church."

The recent ad supporting Marshall was signed by only one current seminary employee, Paul Debusman, the seminary's reference librarian. However, several former seminary employees and two former seminary trustees signed the statement: Charles Bugg, former preaching professor; Donoso Escobar, former social work professor; Paul Richardson, former music professor; Bill Rogers, former dean of the Christian education school; Wayne Ward, former theology professor; Roy Savage and Dub Steincross, former seminary trustees.

The document also was signed by two professors at sister seminaries, Stanley Nelson of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and William Tillman of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Other well-known signers include Charlotte Hoover of Virginia, who has been a major donor to the seminary in the past, and Lloyd Elder, former president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Marshall is to begin new duties this fall as visiting professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan., an American Baptist seminary which also has ties to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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Religious Roundtable planning 1996 National Affairs Briefing

By Mark Wingfield

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- The organization that publicly tied the knot between Ronald Reagan and the Religious Right in 1980 plans to hold a major national forum next January in an attempt to influence the 1996 presidential election.

Ed McAteer, a Baptist layman from Memphis, Tenn., and president of the Religious Roundtable, has announced plans for another National Affairs Briefing Jan. 19-20, 1996. All candidates for president will be invited to address the crowd, which could top 22,000 people, McAteer said.

The forum will be "educational" in nature and "we will not endorse any candidates," he said.

McAteer said the two-day event also will feature addresses by prominent "family values" speakers such as Jerry Falwell, Adrian Rogers, Gary Bauer, James Kennedy, Richard Land, Ralph Reed, Phyllis Schlafly and Don Wildmon.

The Religious Roundtable has hosted a number of National Affairs Briefings in the past 15 years, but is best remembered nationally for its 1980 briefing at Reunion Arena in Dallas. At that event, more than 20,000 people heard presidential candidate Ronald Reagan declare, "I know you cannot endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you."

In the subsequent 1980 election, the support of conservative Christians was considered pivotal in Reagan's defeat of the incumbent president, Jimmy Carter, who declined an invitation to the Dallas conference.

The Religious Roundtable also held a national event prior to the 1992 election, at which George Bush spoke but Bill Clinton did not. Both had been invited.

The 1996 National Affairs Briefing has the potential to be even bigger than the Dallas briefing, McAteer said. "This one at this stage has conservatively 10 times the interest of any of the rest of them."

The 1996 event will differ from previous briefings during election years, he noted. Previous briefings have been scheduled after the party primaries, and only candidates for the final presidential ballot were invited.

The 1996 conference is scheduled for January, prior to the New Hampshire primary and well before either party's national convention. All active candidates for the presidency at that time will be invited to speak.

The scheduling change is "very significant," McAteer said, and reflects that much is at stake as Republicans and Democrats head into their national conventions.

"We want them to know before they nominate their candidates, here is how this bloc of voters feels about it," he explained. "We don't want them taking us for granted."

The Republican Party in particular faces schism between religious conservatives and fiscal conservatives. In a news conference during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting last June, former Nixon staffer Charles Colson suggested the Republican Party will split if the party nominates a presidential candidate who does not support the moral and social views of religious conservatives.

McAteer said he believes there is "no question" that religious conservatives organized through groups such as the Christian Coalition represent "the largest single bloc of voters in America" and will be a potent force either for or against any candidate.

The purpose of the January National Affairs Briefing will be to "impact public policy on moral issues by convincing the candidates that our agenda is very important," he said.

That agenda includes issues such as abortion, school prayer, pornography, national defense, gun ownership, homosexuality and education, McAteer said.

The National Affairs Briefing is being planned by a large steering committee, which includes people such as Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C.; Edwin Meese, former Reagan administration official; John Ankerberg, Christian TV personality; Gary Bauer, president of the Family Research Council; Paul Crouch of Trinity Broadcasting Network; Jerry Falwell, television preacher and founder of the Moral Majority; Wanda Franz, president of National Right to Life; Beverly LaHaye, president of Concerned Women of America; Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission; Marlon Maddoux, radio talk show host; Ralph Reed, president of the Christian Coalition; Adrian Rogers, former SBC president and pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis; Phyllis Schlafly, president of Eagle Forum; and Don Wildmon, president of American Family Association.

McAteer said the event will be held in Memphis, either at the Show Place Arena or at the Pyramid, depending upon pre-registration interest.

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Baptist church employee arrested, charged with killing 3, wounding 4

By Ken Camp

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A maintenance worker at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, is charged with the execution-style murder of three children and the shooting of their mother and three others at an apartment complex a block from the church.

As area residents struggled to come to terms with the tragedy, the church opened its doors to offer counseling and ministry.

John Leslie Wheat, 51, was charged on July 31 with three counts of capital murder and four counts of attempted capital murder.

Six-year-old Ashley Ochoa and her eight-year-old brother, Eddie, each died July 30 from gunshot wounds to the back of the head. Their 20-month-old sister, Lacey, died several hours later. Their mother, Angela Anderson, 28, remained in critical condition at Harris Methodist Hospital in Fort Worth.

The shooting took place just a few minutes before worshippers gathered for Sunday school at Travis Avenue Baptist Church on July 30.

Wheat allegedly began a shooting spree at the Les Jardin Apartments after Anderson accused him of molesting her children. He often cared for the youngsters while their mother worked the late night shift at a plastic factory on Fort Worth's south side.

Wheat was hired by the church as part-time security guard about a year ago and was transferred to the church's maintenance department about six months ago.

"We had absolutely no indication that he could be capable of anything like this," said Michael Dean, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church. "He was always very helpful, conscientious, and very deliberate. He was a good employee for us."

Just one week before the shooting, Eddie and Ashley Ochoa had participated in a neighborhood day camp sponsored by Travis Avenue Church. Eddie had made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ five days before he was killed.

"Eddie was real outgoing, vivacious and full of life," said Pam Reigle, minister to children at the church. "Ashley was a lot quieter, and she followed her brother like a shadow. During the day camp, she always had one of the teen-age helpers wanting to carry her around, she was so sweet."

Although the children were not members of the church, Reigle said their mother made sure they attended Vacation Bible School and the day camp.

"It must have been hard for her being a single parent, but they were both really happy children," Reigle said. "She tried to keep them in line, and you could tell she really cared about them."

In the wake of the shooting, Travis Avenue Baptist Church was expanding its neighborhood ministries to meet both immediate and long-term needs of community residents, according to Dean.

"We are building off of the relationships that we already have established in the neighborhood," he said. "There is a lot of grief, shock and fear."

Dean learned about the shooting on Sunday afternoon when he returned from vacation. Originally, he had planned to come home just long enough to pack his bags for a mission trip to Venezuela.

"Needless to say, I postponed that trip," he said. "I can do that another time. I needed to be close to home right now."

The shooting was a "double tragedy" for Travis Avenue, since both the accused gunman and several of his victims were involved in the life of the church, Dean said.

The situation offered the challenge of ministering not only to victims and their family members, but also to the accused murderer. Dean was scheduled to meet with Wheat in the jail on Tuesday evening, Aug. 1.

Dean also said he had visited with the family of Angela Jay, a Fort Worth police officer, who was seriously wounded in the shooting.

The church was working with the Victim Assistance Office of the Fort Worth Police Department to make its facilities available for neighborhood small group "debriefings."

Scott Floyd, a church member and assistant professor of psychology and counseling at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was coordinating grief counseling and spiritual guidance that the church made available to people in the neighborhood.

The church also set up a fund at a local bank for Anderson's medical expenses and her children's funeral costs.

"When something like this happens, particularly when it involves children, it cuts right to the heart of a neighborhood," Dean said.

"We've made the choice to stay in the heart of the city, and there are risks associated with that. But we are committed to continuing our ministry to this community."

CORRECTION: In the July 24 ABP story, "Fellowship leaders defund peace group over stance on homosexuality," please replace the 15th paragraph with the following:

Earlier a national ministry arm of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. cut funding for the Peace Fellowship because of the February statement. The statement was modified slightly, and Sehested says he is hopeful American Baptists will vote to re-establish ties with the Peace Fellowship this fall.

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